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NOAA FISHERIES DELIVERS WASHINGTON LOWER COLUMBIA SALMON RECOVERY PLAN

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) today released a draft Interim Salmon Recovery Plan for the Lower Columbia River Subbasin. The plan is the first ever, comprehensive science-based recovery plan to be endorsed by NOAA for the recovery of three species of Endangered Species Act-listed salmon and steelhead in the Pacific Northwest.

"Today marks a significant step in salmon recovery efforts," said retired Navy Vice Admiral Conrad C. Lautenbacher, Jr., Ph.D., under secretary for oceans and atmosphere and NOAA Administrator. "We are moving down the path of delivering on the Bush Administration's promise to develop regional recovery plans based on the expertise of local citizens and managers. This comprehensive, coordinated approach to recovery will help ensure that near-record returns over the past few years will become the norm for many years to come."

"This plan is good for salmon and it's good for the people of Washington," said Washington Governor Christine Gregoire. "I congratulate the diverse local, tribal and other interests of the Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board for this important achievement," she added.

The Lower Columbia Fish Recovery Board, a team made up of members of the state legislature, city and county governments, the Cowlitz Tribe, private property owners, hydroelectric project operators, environmental interests, and other concerned citizens, developed the plan locally. The draft plan includes specific measures to recover all salmon and steelhead species that exist in approximately 1,700 river and stream miles on the Washington side of the lower Columbia River subbasins from the Chinook River near the Pacific Ocean to and including the Little White Salmon River in the Columbia River Gorge area. This includes the Lower Columbia chinook, Lower Columbia steelhead and Lower Columbia chum, which were listed under ESA in 1998 and 1999, which in recent years have experienced up to 700 percent improvement.

Highlights of the plan include:

- *Evaluation of Current Population Status.* The Draft Plan evaluates the current distribution, diversity, abundance and productivity for each salmon population, compares them to historical trends, and evaluates the current risk of extinction for each population.

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- *Comprehensive Analyses of Limiting Factors.* The Draft Plan includes a comprehensive analysis of limiting factors to salmon and steelhead throughout their lifecycle, including harvest, hatchery management, hydro operations, habitat and estuary conditions, predation, and what steps needed to address these limiting factors.
- *Recovery Goals and Actions Consistent with ESA.* The Draft Plan sets recovery goals and activities that provide NOAA Fisheries objective, measurable criteria that, when met, would result in a determination that the species could be proposed for de-listing. It also identifies specific actions to achieve the goals and parties responsible for implementation.
- *Monitoring and Adaptive Management.* To ensure that the plans are effective and based on the most accurate science, the Draft Plan allows for regular and periodic review of the progress and effectiveness of the actions and status of the fish populations.

The Lower Columbia Plan is part of a larger commitment made in 2002 by NOAA Fisheries to develop regional salmon recovery plans. Elements of over 60 subbasin and watershed plans from all across the Northwest are in the process of being incorporated into larger regional recovery plans for salmon and steelhead in the Interior Columbia Basin, the Snake River Basin, the Oregon Coast, and Puget Sound areas. NOAA will receive draft plans from various recovery teams later this year and expects to finalize them in 2006.

NOAA Fisheries' Northwest Regional Administrator Bob Lohn stated, "These plans will help make salmon recovery efforts much more effective because they will focus resources to address factors that are limiting salmon throughout their lifecycle on a watershed by watershed basis."

NOAA, an agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce, is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through research to better understand atmospheric and climate variability and to manage wisely our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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On the Web:

NOAA: <http://www.noaa.gov>

The draft plan can be found at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov/>. It is available for public comment for 60 days.